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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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COUNTRY Estonia

DATE DISTR. 15 JUN 1954

SUBJECT Comments on Topography, Agriculture and
Transportation for Section of Tartu County

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PLACE
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1.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

2. the area is primarily level, the highest point being Voore Mountain, 122.9 meters above sea level /See #1 on map/. From Tartu, 65.2 meters above sea level, east to Peipsi Lake, 30.1 meters above sea level, there is a gradual downward slope of about one meter every kilometer. The largest swampy area, about two thousand hectares, extends from Tartu south a distance of approximately five kms to Reola. Excluding Tartu, the area was primarily agricultural, comprising individual farms, although some lumber, for the match industry, was cut in the wooded areas where portable saw mills were set up. In addition, each township had a cooperative dairy where milk was pasteurized, bottled, etc.

DRAINAGE

3. The earth was a mixture of clay and sand and despite the fact that there were many canals and drainage ditches in this area, water did drain away from the surface fairly well after a rain, with the exception of the swamps. Until 1935 the great swamp south of Tartu was usually flooded, at which time a canal was dug in the Savijogi, connecting with the Emajogi, which took most of this water off thus permitting much of the swamp to be used for pasture. The swamp, which could be successfully crossed on foot if one were careful, was covered with peat to a depth of four meters which was often taken out and used for heating purposes when wood was scarce.

* To borrow map call code 143, Map call number - VFK-2438.25X1A
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4. The Emajogi (Mother River), the largest in the area, averaged about six meters in depth, and was navigable for small craft all the way to Peipsi Lake. The Porijsi and Savijogi averaged two to three meters in depth while other smaller rivers and streams were quite shallow. All had muddy bottoms, with some sand mixed in, no rocks, islands or sandbars. The average rate of current was approximately one half a meter per second. All flowed near the surface and had water in them throughout the year. Water was quite safe to drink, although near the swamps it had a marshy taste.

5. There were comparatively few lakes in this area. Of these Aardla Lake was the largest and had several meters of mud on the bottom. Other lake bottoms had some sand mixed with the mud, but contained no stones or rocks. All were spring fed and there was no variation in the water level. Banks were low and gently sloping. [redacted] no water in this entire area was contaminated in such a way as to be harmful to the human body.

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VEGETATION

6. Vegetation consisted of cultivated crops, pastures, orchards, some forests and swampland.

7. The wooded sections contained pine, fir, birch and aspen trees, their average height being 25 meters. If the forest was young the first branches started much lower than if it was old. [redacted] the first branches on pine trees were approximately 10 meters above ground, on fir trees six meters and on other small trees two to two and one half meters above the ground.

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8. Grass on the pastures averaged 30-50 centimeters high and was dense in some places and patchy in others. There were no areas where it was so dense that it was impossible to cross on foot. The only areas where one could hide successfully would be in the young fir forests and other wooded areas. The swampy areas would not lend themselves to concealment. [redacted] some Soviet paratroopers came down in the wooded area near Kaagvere (See #3 on map), but it was not long before they were detected.

AGRICULTURE

9. The major crops were rye, oats, potatoes, with some wheat, clover, flax and sunflowers. All were planted in the spring and harvested in the autumn, with the exception of rye which was a winter variety planted in the fall and harvested the following summer. Each farm usually had an orchard with perhaps 45-50 apple trees, 20-40 cherry trees and a few plum and pear trees.

10. The average farm had perhaps 10-12 cows, 10-15 sheep and five or six pigs. In addition each farmer raised a few chickens, ducks and geese. Horses were used for plowing although tractors averaged about four to every 10 farms.

11. This area of Estonia had a fairly high rate of production for cultivated crops and was increasing yearly, although it had by no means reached its possible potential.

12. Pastures for cattle were usually surrounded by wire fences, but there were few, if any, stone walls or wooden fences in this area.

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13. There were few animal diseases to contend with although sheep pastured in the vicinity of swamps often contracted a liver disease. There were no plant pests which threatened crop production.

WEATHER AND CLIMATE

14. Summer (average 35° C) extended from the end of June or early July until the middle of September. The first frost usually appeared in early October and the snow about the first of December which lasted until the end of March or early April. The lowest winter temperature was about -25° C. From April until the end of June it was pleasantly cool.
15. The heaviest rain came during October and November with lighter rain during April and May. There was no particular season when there was no rain at all. The average annual rainfall in Tartu County was 588 mm, as compared to 635 mm per year in Narva County.
16. The sky was clear for the most part except during the autumn and spring when it was apt to be cloudy. Prevailing winds were from the southwest, but there were no particular seasons when the wind blew more than others. Hazy days were few and only occasionally during a particularly dry spell would there be dust in the air.
17. The winters from 1940-1944 were considerably milder than those preceding [redacted] had snow on the ground for three or four months. Although the winters from 1940-1944 had less snow there was still plenty of ice. All rivers, streams, lakes and even the swamps were completely frozen, with ice reaching a thickness of 1/2 to 3/4 of a meter, so that one could walk or drive an automobile or truck anywhere. The Emajogi was also completely frozen during the winter and used as a highway. Fog on the swamps was common in the early mornings during the summer, but as soon as the sun broke through it quickly disappeared.

TRANSPORTATION

18. The roads as shown on the map are correct and were constructed of hard gravel. Roads were kept in fairly good condition and were well marked with directional signs. First class roads were open during the winter, but due to lack of funds and equipment, all other roads were closed to automobile traffic. During the winter months horse-drawn sleighs provided the only transportation. In addition to the motor bridges in Tartu there was a bridge across the Emajogi near Kaagvere (See 4 on map). There was a ferry east of Tartu (See 5 on map) used to cross the Emajogi at this point. Traffic in this area was confined to the local population, the heaviest occurring between five and six in the morning when farmers took their milk to the dairies and their produce to market.
19. The railroad lines are correct as shown and, as railroads were the most important means of transportation in this area for both passengers and freight, they were kept in good condition.
20. The only airfield was that outside of Tartu. This was a military field and was greatly enlarged during World War II. It was rumored that the Soviets were planning to build another field (See 6 on map), but I do not know how far these plans progressed.

POPULATION

21. The permanent population of this area was entirely Estonian, although during the summer many Russians, who lived in the area of Peipsi Lake, were brought in to help with the farming, after which they would return to their homes. There were no restrictions placed on the movement of the local population and the only forbidden area was the airfield in Tartu.

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